

From: Randy Strauss
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 1/23/02 1:56pm
Subject: Microsoft Settlement

[Text body exceeds maximum size of message body (8192 bytes). It has been converted to attachment.]

23Jan02

I found out this morning you are seeking public comment.
Please excuse me if I tell you things you already know.

I am a programmer, with an masters in CS Stanford from the early 1980's.
I have worked on many platforms and now have a Mac and a dual
boot Windows/Linux machine. I worked at Frame Technology and
stayed with FrameMaker when Adobe bought them, working on
all 3 platforms though mostly on the Unix product, mostly on the UI.

To me, Microsoft is best known for lowering software standards.
They didn't invent the term "vaporware" or "FUD" (fear, uncertainty and
doubt), but they were the first ones to make a constant profit from
selling vaporware and beta software and from using FUD to
consistently stop others from penetrating a market. Companies
constantly wait for MS to move in a market because they know that
MS will come up with incompatible technology and everyone else
will have to change. Customers would rather not change. No other
company has the power to stop progress and move standards like MS.

In case you don't know FrameMaker, it is the leading professional
long/technical document software. People use it to write manuals
from 50-100 pages to thousands of pages. It is also used to
automate the publishing of documents and forms. Though I've left
Adobe, I probably shouldn't say how big the market is- but FM
has always made well under \$100M/year. \$100M/year was seen as
the whole market size and we had a decent piece of it. Luckily, it
was always too small to attract MS attention.

Note that lots of people use Word to write manuals, because it's ubiquitous-
essentially free since it either comes with most machines or is a std
corp package. Yet people complain that Word is abysmal for these
documents- often crashing. We successfully lured writers to use FM, but
then these writers had huge problems getting content into FM. We wrote
filters and partnered with filter writers, but MS is the lone DTP (desktop
publisher) vendor that doesn't believe in having a decent exchange format.
Every company thinks it's important to exchange documents except
MS. They kept their format not only secret, but constantly changing.

At Frame, we couldn't afford bugs. Our number one goal was never,
ever to lose user data. Crashing was merely horrible.
When MS came along and made crashing an everyday activity, making
"Blue Screen of Death" a commonly heard phrase, we were astounded.
Over the years they have consistently lowered software standards.
Why could they afford to make shoddy software when no one else could?

One great example of this is in computer security. In the 1980s, all the
unix companies worked on security. Leaving holes in a system wasn't an
option. MS doesn't have to do that. Companies lose billions of dollars a
year to viruses but still have to use MS products. Any other company
would fill the holes. Sun spent huge resources to assure that Java applets
wouldn't damage a computer- so you don't hear of Java viruses. MS doesn't
care. It's cheaper these days to fool customers, to make buggy software
that has security problems. And MS can get away with it because they've
created a culture where it's expected. Companies expect to pay a tax for
virus-prevention software. Even the ones that do realize it's a cost of Windows,
they can't leave Windows. (MS is the only company I know of that
advertises that their software releases are "less buggy than the last one".
It's absolutely astonishing.)

MTC-00017732_0002

01/29/2002 9:53 A

Adobe spends lots and lots of effort making its partners happy, people who create add-on software. Several times they avoided very good acquisitions because it would have meant competing against partners. I know Sun is also very, very careful in this area. Adobe is the 3rd largest commercial software company. Sun is huge. Yet Microsoft thinks nothing of putting their partners out of business. They certainly encourage help, but where others worry about earning a reputation of being hostile to partners, MS does not. Why can they afford to be differeng?

I was so happy when Java came along. Soon I would finally be able to write cross-platform software- same file formats, same UI software. I have two great ideas for developing innovative, useful software. But it means learning MS's very peculiar UI development environment. If MS hadn't stopped Java, I could write it once, simply. I did write an interesting game that my kid loves- but there's no point trying to sell it. Any consumer first has to download Java- and that's too difficult. Once again, MS has stopped innovation and made it harder to compete. Any decent OS manufacturer would have been happy to incorporate Java. Any OS maker who cared about innovation or quality products or making software better or better software, that is.

FrameMaker has an API so that one can write a program to control FM. Adobe had a project a few years ago to put an easy-to-use UI atop FM to make a SOHO (small-office/home-office) DTP product. The FM back-engine was superior to anything in the market. The front-end (UI) was novel and made it easy to create great documents. The only other big player in the \$250M SOHO publish market is MS, with MS Publisher. Our product was nearing alpha when MS announced a new version. Our product would still be way ahead, but Adobe didn't want to get in a marketing war with MS- they were much richer and we didn't want to compete with that bottom line. The rumors I heard were that Adobe didn't want to be seen as a company that MS should squash. If MS wanted to, they could start buying, marketing and launching graphics products to compete against Adobe's core business. Adobe turned tail and halted the project. Customers suffered.

Early in the days of the lawsuits, I heard talk about MS being innovative. Yet only a tiny fraction of "their innovations" are really theirs. They buy innovation, kill most of it, and gut the rest. If these companies were allowed to compete and grow, we'd have much better software solutions.

I don't see how any settlement with Microsoft will change their practices. One thing I learned through 19 years in corporate environments is that a company's culture reflects management's personality. Consciously and unconsciously, Microsoft employees know how their company works. Their attitudes are not going to change unless huge changes happen at the company.

I've heard Gates talk over the years. He has grandiose ideas about bringing the world into the future, integrating with TV and appliances. He doesn't talk about doing it with others, just about what he and MS will do. MS does not have a culture of working with others, certainly not one of fair competition.

I've talked to people who worked at MS and at other tech companies. At other companies, people, even at the bottom of the ladder, talk about being part of the team, part of the vision. Not at MS. There only the programmers are part of the team. At other companies QA is central, testing is part of the foundation of software production. MS thinks nothing of alienating its QA people. Where other companies want their QA people to be full-time and really know the product, MS insisted (maybe still does?) that QA people be contractors and go elsewhere after a 2-year maximum. Though it would help explain their shoddy products, it's still astounding.

MTC-00017732_0003

I have been a MS stock owner at times. I'm not now. If the company would be broken up, I'd be interested again. I'd be interested in a company that wants to make a good OS. I'd be interested in a company that wants to make good products. MS just isn't that company.

MS seems to have gotten their early monopoly through fair competition and business practices. But then they abused it to develop other monopolies and lower the software standards for everyone. Requiring computer makers to bundle their software, breaking their Java license and giving their browser away free to beat Netscape were just the most visible instances. My wife worked at 3Com for years and the stories were everywhere. MS is a bully and could get away with it not because they were big, but because they had a monopoly and if you did not put up with their bullying, you didn't play. She had tons of stories about planned conferences where MS would change the schedule at the last minute to shut out 3com or agree on a press release and then release something else. MS doesn't care about decent business practices because they can use their monopoly to cow almost all companies. And the DOJ will only hear cases coming to court from people that tried to fight back, not the thousands of cases where people sold out, buckled under or just recognized the playing field and played along.

I remember when the anti-trust suits against IBM changed their business practices. It was wonderful for the industry and turned them into a much better company for all of us. This needs to be done with Microsoft. Bush sold us all out with the federal settlement.

I have a dual boot machine with Windows and Linux. The modem, a new, high-end modem, doesn't work for me- it almost works and others have had it work, but there's no tech support for Linux use because the vendor needs only care about Windows. If it was a law-abiding monopoly, I wouldn't complain. It's not.

I don't get cable TV because it's too expensive. I'd be willing to pay \$100/year for a few good channels, but \$600/yr is much too much. Cable TV is a monopoly I resist, even though I have 2 pretty main-stream kids. At the moment I would not own Windows unless I had to. I looked for a Linux machine that would just work, but couldn't find one. Every other PC had Windows pre-installed. Because of MS's monopoly, and the ruthless, illegal ways they've kept and expanded it, there're very few choices on the market. If I can't make it work in another month or so, I'll consider spending a bunch more money and get a Mac with OSX. MS has made choice very, very expensive.

Thanks for the ear.
Your decision is our best hope at the moment.
Take care,
Randy Strauss
1815 Walnut Dr
Mountain View, CA 94040
650-381-6078 (work, at Nominum)
650-279-6849 (cell)

MTC-00017732_0004